

# An analysis of the evolution of Japan's international student enrollment policy

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**Abstract:** Since the 1980s, Japan, at the national level, has gradually strengthened the acceptance of foreign students through the "Plan on Receiving 100,000 International Students", "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students", "Plans on International Infrastructure Project" and "Super University Support Plan". Through the analysis of the internationalization policies and international student enrollment policies of Japanese universities at various stages, it can be found that the foreign student based acceptance policies of Japan have completed the transition from pursuing quantity to pursuing quality.

**Key words:** international students; internationalization of higher education; Japanese education

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## 1 Introduction

With the economic globalization, the internationalization of higher education has become one of the contents to improve the competitiveness of each country, and attracting more foreign students is an important means of its development. As one of the countries with more developed higher education, Japan has always attached great importance to the reception of international students. Since the 1980s, in order to accelerate the international competitiveness of universities, Japan has formulated a number of policies to promote the reception of international students.

## 2 "Plan on receiving 100,000 international students" and "plan on receiving 300,000 international students"

In 1983, under the background of the need to improve the process of internationalization and strengthen international academic exchanges, the Japanese government proposed the "Plan on Receiving 100,000 International Students". The specific content of the plan is to adjust the university's receiving system, educational guidance, educational consultation and to promote education on Japanese language for overseas students by improving education on Japanese language in Japan and abroad. Besides, the contents also include ensuring good dormitory management and service for international students, developing the diversity of non-governmental activities as well as enriching the tracking support for returned students. Since the number of foreign students failed to reach the expected target, the Japanese education authorities further expanded the acceptance of foreign students after 2000. In 2004, the total number of foreign students in Japan exceeded 100,000, fulfilling the goal of "Plan on Receiving 100,000 International Students".

After the implementation of Japan's "Plan on Receiving 100,000 International Students", the policy of accepting foreign students have not been improved and developed, leading to a significant decrease in the number of students

studying abroad. A large outflow of talents was caused with a negative growth. At the same time, competition from other Asian countries was also increasing. China and South Korea were also paying more and more attention to the development of knowledge economy. The position of Japanese universities in international rankings also puts pressure on Japan. Against this background, in 2008, the Japanese government put forward the "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students". Key elements of the plan include the launch of one-stop overseas study services and simplifying admission and entry procedures to make studying abroad in Japan smoothly. To promote the internationalization of the university, and build a charming university creating a comfortable learning environment for international students and promote social acceptance after graduation and seek social globalization, they have proposed corresponding strategies during the implementation process. The definition of international students has been revised to facilitate the statistics and management of international students in the future. The scope of receiving foreign students has been expanded, and the limitation of Japanese as the threshold has been lowered, which is conducive to the introduction of talents. The improvement and expansion of the short-term study abroad system, to some extent, has promoted the expansion of English courses in Japanese colleges and universities, and made educational institutions such as universities more internationalized.

According to the results of the survey on the status of overseas students in Japan and the number of Japanese students studying overseas released by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology of Japan in 2020, as of May 2019, the number of Japanese students studying abroad was about 312,000. The results show that the program is a success, even reaching its goal a year early.

### **3 International infrastructure projects and super university support programs**

#### **3.1 Internationalized infrastructure projects**

To support the implementation of the "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students", both to students and international high-end individuals, the Japanese government in 2009 began to implement internationalized infrastructure projects, paid attention to the quality of students plan Global 30 (hereinafter referred to as Global 30 plan). Global 30 plan was based on the body of the university to carry out policies and promote the development of internationalization of Japan, helping the realization of the "students in 300,000 people plan" and formulating policies [1].

In April 2009, the Japan Society for the Promotion of Academic Studies published the *Conditions for Preparations for International Pilot Universities -- Globalization 30*, in which the criteria for being selected as a pilot university were stipulated. According to the specified criteria, 7 national and 6 private universities were selected from the 15 national and 7 private universities that submitted their applications as the first batch of pilot universities under the Global 30 programme.

According to the plan, the university identified as the pilot of Global 30 plan will focus on promoting the reception of international students, and strive to build a first-class national university from the following five aspects: The degree is conferred in English; improving the reception environment for international students and realizing the internationalization of the university; Office for overseas students has been established; improving the objective evaluation system; establishing the operating system of an international university.

The launch of Global 30 marked a shift in Japan's foreign student acceptance policy from a focus on quantity to a focus on quality. The program's full English teaching plan had attracted more excellent foreign students to study in Japan.

#### **3.2 Super university support scheme**

After absorbing the problems of the Global 30 program, the Japanese government, aiming at building a world-class university, had formulated the "Super Global University Support Program", which was called Super Global University (SGU Program). As an upgraded version of Global 30 program, the Japanese government, in order to attract outstanding foreign students to study in Japan, set English teaching programs in universities under the SGU program, and recruited

outstanding foreign students from all over the world through the English entrance examination. SGU program was officially launched in 2014. Compared with Global 30 program, SGU program is larger in scale and has more diverse recruitment methods. The purpose of this plan is to vigorously promote "university reform" and "internationalization", "strengthen the international universality of the university, enhance international competitiveness, and improve the teaching environment of the university" [2].

However, the SGU program also has some significant problems, among which the most serious problem is that universities attach too much importance to the world university rankings, blindly pursue quantitative indicators, blindly pursue growth, thus ignoring the essence of internationalization and changes in the external environment.

#### **4 An analysis of the evolution of Japan's enrollment policy for foreign students**

Through the above analysis, we can see that Japan's foreign student policy has been continuously promoted and improved, and we can see that Japan has shifted its focus from the original "Plan on Receiving 100,000 Overseas Students" and "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students" based quantitation-oriented policy to the policy of "Global 30" and "SGU" in pursuit of international development. Japan's initial policy of enrolling foreign students has been influenced by two aspects. First, with the rapid development of economy, Japan's internationalization process is slower than that of other developed countries. In addition, there are problems left over from history and increased trade frictions with many other countries, which make the situation more tense. Second, the aging of Japanese society and the problem of fewer children urgently require talent supplement. Therefore, the expansion of international student enrollment policy as an important national policy has been formulated and implemented.

For these reasons, the policy of "Plan on Receiving 100,000 International Students" was launched. Although there were social problems such as illegal overstaying of overseas students and illegal work during the implementation period, and Japan was in the period of bubble economy, and its economic stagnation led to the lost of the source of overseas students. The internationalization of Japanese higher education is still based on the "volume" of foreign student exchanges. In 2010, with the rapid development of economic globalization, the "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students" was launched. On the basis of pursuing the number of foreign students, the plan was faced with problems such as the world university ranking and the competitive pressure from the development of higher education in Asian countries, which made the policy to embrace new development so as to cultivate high-end talents. Attracting excellent foreign students can be made by improving the educational strength of domestic colleges and universities.

The Global 30 project was launched in conjunction with the "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students". By helping some universities improve their international competitiveness and building English teaching system, it has facilitated the recruitment of more talents. However, in the process of paying attention to "quality", this plan has caused a significant gap among universities, which has not played a helpful role in improving the international competitiveness of higher education as a whole and lacks permanence.

"SGU" not only takes into account the basic goals, but also makes plans that meet its own characteristics based on the needs of different types and levels of colleges and universities. At the same time, the plan was improved step by step, and the target was refined, quantified, clear and effective to promote the international common examination as the examination content of colleges and universities and strengthen the connection with colleges and universities and internationalization.

#### **5 Conclusion**

The above shifts of foreign student recruitment policy can reflect the shift of the Japanese government's emphasis in making relevant policies. In the early stage, due to the insufficient number of overseas students, the internationalization level of Japanese universities was low, which affected the ranking of Japanese universities in the World University

Rankings. The Japanese government formulated the "Plan on Receiving 100,000 International Students" and the "Plan on Receiving 300,000 International Students" to attract foreign students. At the same time, in order to ensure the economic source of overseas students in Japan, the Japanese Office of Immigration and Exiting Countries had formulated a "qualification permit" system that allowed overseas students to work part-time to earn money outside the scope of activities in Japan stipulated in the study visa. However, as a result of the large number of foreign students coming to Japan, the internationalization of Japanese universities had improved, but the quality of students had declined. Based on the demand for high-end talents, the Japanese government's demand for overseas students has changed from quantity demand to quality demand [3].

### **Conflicts of interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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